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Retired U.S. General Is Called Key to Contra Weapons

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 23 — Retired Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord is a West Point graduate, a much-decorated combat pilot and a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense who was instrumental in persuading the Senate to sell top-secret Awacs radar surveillance planes to the Saudi Arabians in 1981.

He is also, according to sources who wish to remain anonymous and some public evidence, a key figure in the extensive network supplying critical aid to the insurgents in Nicaragua. The network purports to be privately financed and operated but has the public blessing and seeming covert support of the Reagan Administration.

The name of General Secord came up several times this week in connection with the network.

An American businessman, who has had extensive high-level business dealings with Saudi Arabia, said he was approached in April 1984 by the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and asked to cooperate with General Secord in funneling Saudi funds to the contras. He said he refused.

A Denial by Saudis

The Saudi Embassy here denied any involvement in aiding the contras and a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency, also implicated by the businessman in the alleged supply operation, called his account "a false story."

General Secord, who lives and maintains an office in Virginia, could not be reached for comment. But he said through a lawyer in connection with another, separate, disclosure linking him to the support network this week that he had no connection with any supply operations on behalf of the contras.

He did not return telephone calls Wednesday or today, but a close associate, who asked not to be identified, said

the former general does give "military guidance" to the insurgents.

General Secord is an expert on airborne supply operations with experience in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Other Links Reported

Besides the allegation that he was a conduit for Saudi aid to the contras — purportedly given as a quid pro quo for United States agreement to provide the Awacs — General Secord reportedly has other links to the contra supply operation.

United Press International reported this week that Salvadoran Government documents provided to it point to an extensive contra support network run by Americans in San Salvador. According to the documents, a dozen phone calls were made from contra "safe houses" in San Salvador to either General Secord's business number in Falls Church or to another number where he was receiving calls.

In the aftermath of that revelation, General Secord denied any knowledge of the safe houses, but conceded he did give military advice to the rebels.

Some members of Congress, notably Senator John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat who is a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, want to know more about General Secord's role in the supply network.

In a staff report made public last week, Senator Kerry called for "a full-scale Congressional investigation, with testimony taken under oath, and witnesses required to testify under subpoena if necessary, in order to get the truth" about the participation of private citizens and the role of the Government in the contra supply network.

Among those Mr. Kerry said should be called to testify under oath is General Secord.

Others the Senator mentions include John K. Singlaub, a retired major gen-

eral and chief fund-raiser for the private supply network; Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the deputy director for political affairs of the National Security Council; Robert Owen, a public relations man who was under contract to the State Department's Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office for several months through May of this year, and Thomas Posey, a former Marine corporal who is head of an aid group called Civilian Matériel Assistance based in Decatur, Ala.

The Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office administered the \$27 million in humanitarian assistance to the Nicaraguans voted by the Congress. That aid was specifically nonlethal, but the business card of its coordinator, P. J. Buechler, was found in the

wallet of one of the American pilots killed when the cargo plane they were flying was shot down over Nicaragua on Oct. 5. Mr. Buechler said he gave the card to the pilot in connection with a shipment of "nonlethal aid sometime in 1986."

Senator Kerry's staff, which bases its conclusions on interviews with some 50 witnesses with knowledge of the aid network, along with press accounts and other sources, maintains that the private aid network is directed by Colonel North through General Singlaub and Mr. Owen.

The report suggests that General Secord should be questioned about his role in the sale of the Awacs to the Saudis and in particular about whether purported aid to the contras by the Saudis was a "kickback" for the planes.